



Spectrum Strong's Back-to-School Checklist: Helping Your Child Start the School Year with Confidence

No child needs every item on this list. Pick the ideas that fit your child and your family best.



Build Predictability

- ☐ Gradually adjust bedtime and wake-up times.
- ☐ Practice the morning routine a few times before school starts.
- ☐ Create a simple visual schedule or checklist.
- ☐ Pack the backpack the night before.



Get Familiar with School

- ☐ Visit the school or playground if possible.
- ☐ Practice the drive, walk, or bus route.
- ☐ Look at pictures of the classroom, teacher, or school.
- ☐ Read a social narrative about the first day.



Support Communication

- ☐ Talk about what the first day might look like.
- ☐ Practice asking for help using your child's preferred communication (speech, AAC, gestures, sign, etc.).
- ☐ Remind your child that all feelings are welcome.



Plan for Sensory Needs

- ☐ Pack any helpful sensory tools (headphones, fidgets, chew, sunglasses, etc.).
- ☐ Talk about what helps your child feel calm and regulated.
- ☐ Remember that sensory preferences can change depending on the environment or how your child is feeling.



Connect with the School

- ☐ Share your child's strengths and interests with the teacher.
- ☐ Let staff know what helps when your child feels overwhelmed.
- ☐ Discuss communication preferences and supports.
- ☐ Celebrate teamwork because everyone is working toward the same goal.

Make Space for Regulation

- ☐ Expect your child may be extra tired after school.
- ☐ Build in time for rest, movement, or preferred activities.
- ☐ Keep after-school commitments light during the first few weeks if possible.
- ☐ Focus on connection before correction.

Celebrate the Little Wins

- ☐ Getting dressed.
- ☐ Walking into school.
- ☐ Riding the bus.
- ☐ Trying something new.
- ☐ Asking for help.
- ☐ Making it through a hard day.
- ☐ Going back again tomorrow.

Every one of these is progress.

A Reminder for Parents

Your child doesn't need a "perfect" first day.

They need caring adults who see their strengths, understand their needs, and remind them that they belong exactly as they are.

Progress isn't measured by how closely a child matches someone else's expectations—it's measured by growing confidence, increasing comfort, and feeling safe enough to learn.

You've got this. Have a fantastic 2026-2027 school year! 

~Your friends at Spectrum Strong Autism Parent Network